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ABSTRACT

Consisting of five pages, the information sheet offers suggestions to follow when making a home visit in a suspected case of child abuse or neglect, lists the kinds of physical and behavioral forms and indicators of abuse and neglect to look for, and provides suggested responses to commonly made remarks and questions of the client during the home visit. Suggested ways of making a home visit in a suspected case of child abuse or neglect include: getting rid of any assumptions or prejudgements concerning the case; reviewing the role of the home visitor; resisting the temptation to be authoritarian, accusatory, or demeaning; composing oneself and one's thoughts; referring to interviewing approaches and techniques for securing information; not letting any personal value judgement or moralizations show on one's face or in one's behavior; inquiring if other members of the family are to be included in the interview; keeping cool, maintaining a sense of humor and perspective; not confronting anyone with facts from the report or with indicators one can see on the child; asking the clients for suggestions as to what they feel is necessary; and under no circumstances giving them information about who made the report. (ERB)

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THE HOME VISIT

HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE FORMS AND INDICATORS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Fall 1980

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THE HOME VISIT: OR, HOW TO MAKE AN INITIAL HOME VISIT IN A SUSPECTED CASE OF CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT, MAINTAIN YOUR COOL, GET THE INFORMATION YOU NEED, AND TAKE A GIANT STEP TOWARD TREATMENT AND SERVICE DELIVERY.

1. Try to get rid of any assumptions, morbid curiosities and fears, moral or ethical prejudices and prejudgments, and especially any dread. On the way to the home visit, hypnotize yourself into a cheerful mood, so that by the time you knock on the door, you can smile when it is answered, and not turn your client off before you've said a word.

2. Review your role, remember that you chose it yourself, and that the client is most likely NOT fulfilling such self-made decisions and choices, but reacting in a situation of extreme stress.

3. Resist the temptation to be authoritarian, mudgmental, coercive, accusatory, and demeaning. Remember that each client is an individual human being with great needs and great potential and deserving of respect.

4. When you walk up to the door, stop, take three deep breaths before you knock, in order to compose yourself and your thoughts. Have your first introductory sentence down perfect. Example:

> "Good day, Mr. (or Ms.) Jones. I am Mary Harjo from the Tribal Social Services Department. It has been brought to our attention that Johnny has been hurt recently, and I am here to take a report from you. May I come in?"

5. If they refuse to let you enter and simply shut the door on you, wait outside for 15-30 minutes. In most cases they will come back and invite you in. This is ESPECIALLY true if they are NOT abusive and/or if they ARE abusive and honestly seek help.

6. If they let you enter the home, refer to interviewing approaches and techniques for securing information, for assessment of the home environment, and the dynamics and characteristics of interview responses, and to other papers produced by this agency (such as the "Characteristics of Domestic Violence" sheet, and the "Incest" paper).

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7. If they tell you they don't have to let you in, remind them that you are required by law to take a report from them, and if they would just help you with the report, it probably won't be necessary to involve the courts.

8. If they start shouting angrily and cursing at you, simply tell them: "I can see you are not ready to discuss this with me now. I'll come back in exactly one hour." Turn around and get in your car and drive away. Return in exactly one hour.

9. Be careful not to let any personal value judgments or moralizations show on your face or in your behavior. If the house is filthy, don't let your disgust at sitting on a smelly couch or at a nasty table show. An insulted client is an uncooperative client. Seek out something positive you can say, even if it's just "I didn't realize this house was so roomy; it looks smaller from the outside." Or, "What a nice plant. I love house plants."

10. Ask where the other members of the family are and if they can be included in the interview. Be careful not to be accusatory. Don't say "is the perpetrator of the bruises in?" Instead, ask "is your husband home," or "is Johnny home from school yet?" or "is there anyone else I should ask to help me make this report?" Some suggested responses to some common statements and/or questions are listed separately.

11. At all times try to keep your cool, to maintain a sense of humor and perspective, to underplay the possible serious ramifications and to overplay the desire to be of assistance to the family. Do not mention any legal actions unless asked about them. And then be sure to mention options and possibilities.

12. Do not confront anyone with facts from the report, or with indicators you can see on the child(ren). Let them give their OWN explanations and justifications and descriptions. Do not put words in their mouths. Example: Do not say "How do you explain Johny's facial bruises?" Say instead: "Would you tell me what you know about the incident when Johnny was hurt?"

13. Ask them for suggestions as to what THEY feel is necessary at this time. Tell them what services you can provide, or other agencies in the community have available.

14. Absolutely under NO CIRCUMSTANCES are you EVER to give them information about who made the report, not even GENERAL information, such as "it was a neighbor." This must NEVER HAPPEN. It violates the client's confidentiality and makes you liable for a law suit.

SOME FORMS AND INDICATORS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Following are some indicators you can look for that might indicate child abuse or neglect In general, physical abuse can be discovered and identified more easily than sexual abuse neglect, or emotional abuse, because there are obvious physical indicators that can be seen. Some of these include:

1. BRUISES. Especially if they are recurring, but also bruises to the face, the back and buttocks, up and down the arms or legs, or unexplained bruises

2. BURNS. Especially cigarette burns, scald burns, and rope burns. Quite often parents will put out cigarettes on their children (hands or feet usually) as a form of punishment or torture. Rope burns around the wrists or ankles are often signs of having been tied up or restrained.

3. BALD SPOTS. This is often a sign of hair-pulling.

4. BITES. Human bites are usually signs of physical abuse.

5. CUTS, ABRASIANS. Unusual cuts, punctures, or abrasians, especially if there is not at adequate explanation, are usually signs of abuse.

6. FRACTURES, SWOLLEN JOINTS. Often swollen joints or tender parts of the body are signs of having been pulled or twisted, or even broken.

It is important to note that all children can have accidents, and will occasionally have bruised or skinned knees or elbows, and perhaps even occasional accidental burns. But when these are RECURRING, it is worthy of suspicion, or if they occur on usually hidden parts of the body, or on both arms or legs simultaneously, or up and down a leg or the back.

In many cases, if a wife is being battered, the "pecking order" nature of family violence will mean that she is passing on her frustration, anger, and pain to the children. If you see any of the above signs and indicators on the woman, it is at the very best an indication that the children are witnessing family violence, and are at the minimum being emotionally abused. Please refer to the Characteristics of Domestic Violence sheet available from this agency.

You should also be aware of the child's behavior. Often behavior is the only indicator we have of abuse or neglect. It is quite often the only indicator we have of emotional or sexual abuse. Or, if a child is overly embarrassed about bruises or other physical indicators, or is sullen or unwilling to talk about it, or gives an implausible reason for the bruise, chances are it resulted from abuse.

An abused or neglected child will often act out quite unsocially and even destructively. (See this agency's paper on Incest.) Children who are real discipline problems in school or in groups might very well be abused or neglected.

There are those who believe that occasional spanking or paddling constitutes abuse. This definition does not take into consideration the usual kinds of physical discipline visited upon a child, but only those that show up on the child's person in the forms outlined above. Spanking that leaves huge welts, or a cracked pelvis, is most certainly abuse. Thrashing with sticks, chains, cords, or other items that leave scars, welts, cuts, burns, or other damage to the epidermal and sometimes internal structure, is most certainly physical abuse, as is tying a child up with restraints.

When a social worker, Community Health Representative, or SCAN team member visits a home where there is suspected child abuse or neglect, certain behavioral signs and indicators can be noted. Be suspicious if the children are:

Fearful	Hyperactive	Listless	Overly self-sufficient
Withdrawn	Irritable	Detached	Overly pleasing of parents
Overly compliant	Affectionless	Whiney	

The parent may display extreme hostility, irritation, and rage, which are often signs of guilt. Or, on the other hand, the parent may be unusually apathetic and unresponsive. In a case of neglect, the parents are usually low in parenting skills, and the home is unusually dirty, vermin-ridden, smelly, and cluttered. Often the children may have no medical records of shots or other medical attention. Neglected children receive almost no supervision.

The neglectful parent is more disorganized, impulsive, and inconsistent. They cannot seem to cope normally with failure and frustration. They are stubbornly negativistic and have a strong craving for "excitement." They are rebellious to all or any authority. Often they are able to pull off a long period of seemingly mature functioning (can clean up their act for 1-2 months as a dynamic to get you off their backs). They often have a poor memory and poor judgment. There is often acute depression and morbidity, and there may even be a lot of contradiction and vacillation, indicating some ambivalence and lack of consistency in their attitudes and relationships. They are often self-destructive (drug abusers, alcoholics, etc.), and show outbursts of uncontrolled fury. (See this agency's paper on "Low Prognosis Categories".) The children are ALL concurrent victims of neglect (that is, they don't just single out one child for neglect, as is often the case with abuse).

There are four basic types of neglect:

(1) Environmental (the home is extremely dirty, unkempt, inadequate)
(2) Personal (the child is filthy, clothes dirty, ill-fed and uncared for, unsupervised and unhealthy, and usually all members suffer similarly)
(3) Educational (children are not required to attend school as a normal prerequisite of their lives; or if they go to school they are very often absent, tardy, or playing hooky)
(4) Medical (lack of attention to medical needs, poor health care, no shots or regular check-ups, etc.)

SOME SUGGESTED RESPONSES TO SOME COMMONLY MADE REMARKS AND QUESTIONS

CLIENT	YOU
You have no right to be here.	Mr. (or Ms.) Jones, I am required by law to be here.
Who told you we abuse our kids?	I won't discuss that. It isn't of any importance to the matter at hand.
Are you gonna take my kids away?	I don't know yet if we'll need the help of the court. Hopefully, it won't be required. I'm more interested in helping the family stay together healthily and happily.
Get the ____away from my door you _____.	You're not ready to discuss this now. I'll be back in one hour.
We used to hit Johnny, but we don't anymore (or we won't again).	Nevertheless, I am required to visit you and get an up-dated report.
All you want to do is take my kid.	My job is to do everything I can to help you, not to split up the family.
I never touched the kid.	Perhaps not, but we are required to visit the home and get a report. Can you help me please?
It's my husband, and I don't dare say anything or he'll beat ME up.	I appreciate the position you're in and the stresses you're under. Can we discuss this more inside?
He only does it when he's drunk.	That's often the case. Perhaps we can work together to find some way to deal with the drinking problem too.
The kid taunted me into it.	Kids can be overwhelming sometimes, can't they? Maybe we can discuss it more inside and wee what we might be able to do to prevent it happening again.

I bet it was that _____nosy neighbor of mine!

**No, but that doesn't matter. The issue is what can we do to help you, not who reported it.

**(Even if they guess the person who made the report, you are NEVER to reveal that. Always deny it. Otherwise you are placed in the position of violating confidentiality and can be sued.)

I don't know what you're talking about. Somebody's just trying to get us in trouble.

Maybe so. But I'm still required by law to make this visit and turn in a report from you. If nothing is going on, the report will say so and we won't have to bother you again.

I can't talk now.

What is a time and place when you can?

I don't have to talk to you.

The law requires that I make a report from a home visit. If you refuse, it will be placed in the court's hands. If you'll just let me visit with you a while, we may be able to avoid that.

Get away from here and don't ever come back!

Mr. (or Ms. Jones), I'll leave if you insist. But I'd prefer to get the information I need from you than to have to turn it over to the courts. It would be much easier for you just to talk to me now.